



Marriage Foundation

Press Release from Marriage Foundation

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High wedding costs deterring young people from tying the knot, finds new study

- Three in 10 young people say wedding costs reason for not marrying
- 87 per cent of 18-30-year-olds want to marry
- Worrying marriage gap developing between rich and poor
- Marriage must not become preserve of the middle class, says top judge
- Marriage Foundation says 'Naked Weddings' can boost numbers tying the knot

High wedding costs are deterring young people from tying the knot and could be creating a dangerous marriage gap between rich and poor, claims a new study from the Marriage Foundation.

The study, *Wedding Costs and the Marriage Gap*, commissioned to mark the start of Marriage Week, found that almost one in three (29 per cent) of young unmarried UK adults aged 18-30 say they would be more likely to get married if the typical wedding was cheaper. While 28 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men surveyed, who were in a relationship cited "wedding cost" as a reason why they were not currently married.

The survey of 2,000 young people also laid bare a growing marriage gap between rich and poor. Asked if they wanted to marry, 87 per cent said yes. But the aspiration to marry ranged from nine in 10 (91 per cent) of high earners wanting to tie the knot to four in five (80 per cent) in the lowest paid jobs such as casual labourers. When this data is compared against the figures of those who "expect to marry" the gap widens to 21 per cent between the highest and lowest paid. This figure nearly doubles to 39 per cent when compared to those who "actually get married".

Just a third (33 per cent) of those classed as semi-skilled workers and 37 per cent of casual labourers get married. This compares to three quarters (76 per cent) of those in higher managerial jobs including doctors, lawyers and headteachers.

Harry Benson, Marriage Foundation's Research Director commented: "These figures are very worrying indeed. They show that those on low or limited incomes are half as likely to marry as those on high incomes such as those in senior managerial positions. While there

are several factors at play, as we have identified in our survey, the perceived cost of a wedding is a major part of this problem. According to several wedding sites the average price tag to get wed, is nearly £32,000, more than the average UK salary. Unsurprisingly our polling shows this eye-watering figure is acting as a deterrent or barrier.

"You really do not have to spend a fortune on a wedding. This is why, as we mark the start of Marriage Week, Marriage Foundation is encouraging those considering getting married not to be put off by the perceived cost. Instead embrace the concept of a 'naked wedding' – a smaller and simpler wedding that dispenses with the need to put yourself into debt just to fund the reception. After all, the cost of a wedding should never be a barrier to making that lifelong commitment to your partner."

The idea of a 'naked wedding' has gained traction during the last 12 months with couples tying the knot unable to have lots of guests and an expensive reception due to COVID restriction.

Mr Benson continued: "Anecdotal evidence suggests that couples marrying during COVID restrictions have found the ceremonies intimate and just as special and magical as larger ones."

He also highlighted examples a number of pre-COVID 'naked weddings'. "The vicar Mike Smith, (St John's Church in Hartford, Cheshire), has been conducting £1,000 weddings over the last couple of years.

"Reverend Smith offers couples the bargain package, including the ceremony, flowers, cake, food and drink for up to 30 guests. Or Charlotte Bass, an events planner from Kent, who got married in 2015. Charlotte posted an online guide on how she saved money on items from invitations to her dress, opting for boho-style nuptials.

"All of these examples and many more show how simpler weddings could boost the numbers of people getting married and start to close the worrying marriage gap between rich and poor."

Marriage Foundation has previously endorsed plans from the Law Commission to allow couples to tie the knot wherever they choose, whether in their local pub, a castle, a field or even a McDonalds.

Currently, wedding ceremonies must take place at a registered religious building and be conducted by an authorised person, such as a priest, who must attend the ceremony and register the marriage.

The Law Commission proposals would see many of these restrictions scrapped, bringing England and Wales in line with Scotland.

Sir Paul Coleridge, founder of the Marriage Foundation commented: "It is nothing short of a national tragedy that large swathes of the population are deterred from marrying because of cost. Our research would seem to show that if a couple cannot afford an extravagant

Hello Magazine type wedding reception costing £30,000 they somehow feel they are not eligible to take advantage of this most important of social arrangements. This never used to be the case. Back in the day more or less everyone from every walk of life made it down the aisle one way or another. No one was deterred by cost. There was no marriage gap between rich and poor

“If there is one very important and beneficial unintended consequence of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, it is that a steady and increasing stream of couples have realised that marriage is so much more than just a glitzy party. Hundreds have tied the knot in small, inexpensive and cleverly designed micro weddings. All report the beauty, intimacy, informality and intensity of these super memorable occasions. For these couples the party may come later but it may not. The restrictions have not got in the way of the main purpose which is to confirm publicly mutual lifelong commitment.

“If the pandemic (along with the changes suggested by the Law Commission) refocuses our attention on the essence of marriage and weddings it could hopefully restore marriage to its proper place in society as being something open to every serious committed couple regardless of wealth or background. Society would be a huge beneficiary.”

Marriage Foundation, in a previous study, *Will cheaper weddings bridge the marriage gap?* by Harry Benson, called for simpler weddings highlighting American research which found that having more guests, but spending less money were each associated with greater subsequent marital happiness and stability.

Mr Benson concluded: “We hope these dramatic findings will act as a wake up to the Government and MPs. All the main party leaders say they support marriage and stable relationships, yet the current support for couples, both before and after getting married is almost non-existent. While the UK's tax system continues to offer little help to married couples and for some financially rewards them living apart.

“So, as we mark Marriage Week, a celebration of the essence of marriage – commitment, love and fidelity, along with the benefits it confers, we challenge the Prime Minister, who is planning his own wedding, to bring forward a bold range of policies to support marriage and married couples.”

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Notes to editors

About Marriage Foundation

Marriage Foundation was founded in 2012 by Sir Paul Coleridge, a High Court judge who was moved by his personal experience in 40 years as a barrister and judge specialising in family law. The think tank seeks to improve public understanding of marriage and to reduce the numbers of people drawn into the family justice system – some 500,000 children and adults each year. It has established itself as a leading voice on marriage issues in the UK.

Sir Paul Coleridge, Harry Benson and Michaela Hyde from the Marriage Foundation are available for comment and for interviews linked to these new findings.

For all media enquiries, please contact Alistair Thompson on 07970 162225